

Washington, DC -- On Wednesday, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7), a former 3-Star Admiral, released the following on President Bush's State of the Union address.

"I believe the loudest message we got out of the election was to try and work together on different issues," noted Joe. "We must work on health, education, the economy, and our defense - starting with Iraq, but including the proper transformation of our military. President Bush touched on these issues tonight. I don't agree necessarily with all the ways he wants to accomplish them. But he is talking about the same issues that I talk about, and I will look at his initiatives in those areas because I believe we do need to sit down and address these hard problems, from energy security and health care affordability to spending reform and educational progress. Specific points of concurrence, but with areas that need to be better addressed, are:

Energy Security

I support investment in alternative and renewable energy sources, and reducing gasoline usage as the President addressed, by endorsing the decrease in gasoline usage by 20% -- as I have proposed in the past. However, I do not agree that we should permit undue waivers or caveats that will not permit the Secretary of Energy to hold his Department and companies accountable to achieving it as an unwaverable goal. I also support higher CAFÉ standards -- up to 40 mpg -- but not by means that unduly permit a standard to be waived unnecessarily by the Secretary; rather, I would measure the CAFÉ standard as a fixed level measured by tailpipe emissions rather than miles per gallon. This will provide the right incentive for engine efficiency rather than less effective ways such as lighter vehicles. I was, however, very pleased that the President spoke to the challenge of global climate change.

Health Security

While the President speech tonight addressed health insurance access, he did so by primarily emphasizing tax incentives that reward the more wealthy rather than the 46 million uninsured or the 16 million underinsured; and he also penalizes those fortunate to have an above-average health care plan by taxing them more so they are "incentivized" to switch to a less beneficial plan. Rather, I believe in order to provide both accessible and affordable quality care, we must pursue a health care system which covers all of us, uses competition and performance standards to discipline costs, shares responsibility between individuals and society for paying for health insurance, and rewards care givers for the quality, not the quantity, of care. President Bush's proposals do not do this.

Economic Security

I was pleased to hear the President talk about pro-growth policies and spending restraint tonight, and ensuring that unnecessary earmarks are unacceptable. However, for any pro-growth policy, I support tax cuts for the middle class, not for the very wealthy; and earmarks need to be transparent - as the President would support -- noting who is the sponsor and recipient, among other public information; and, finally, I support the benefits of our entitlements remaining by ensuring sufficient funding by changing the priorities that are presently financing a tragic misadventure in Iraq and rewarding the very rich with unfair tax incentives, among other misguided rewards to those who do not need them. We must preserve the "safety net" for those in need in a period of transition in their lives, such as the sick, the disabled, and the elderly.

Education Security

I support the transparency and accountability in school performance that No Child Left Behind promises. The President is optimistic about the implementation of 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB), and I support his desire that NCLB be reauthorized. But the fact is that he has failed to fully fund the initiative while granting billions of dollars in tax breaks for the wealthy - we must change that by fully funding NCLB. Additionally, while NCLB measures Adequate Yearly Progress with a single benchmark, I support "value-added" testing, which rewards relative performance, so teachers do not spend their time teaching to the test and penalizing students from more enriching courses and teaching.

Immigration

I agree with the President that we need to protect our borders, not just from illegal immigration, however, but also from narcotic trade and terrorist elements. But we need to do so by advanced, cost-efficient and effective technology such as Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAVs) that can surveil and efficiently pinpoint trespassers, vice a wall that can easily be breeched by tunneling or ladders. I also agree with the President that we cannot support amnesty, but that we must deal with the illegal immigrants in our country, practically and fairly. They must pay a fine, back taxes, get a job, learn English before they will be considered for citizenship...and they must go to the back of the line, but provide for legalized status if they do all of the above.

Security

I do support a full effort in the Global War of Terror (GWOT). However, we are failing to do that best by remaining in Iraq which decreases our security worldwide when doing so. We must reverse our strategy: provide a date certain at least by the end of this year by which we would redeploy out of Iraq, remaining in the region to protect our interest and ensure regional stability by opposing any hegemonic interest of Iran, including not allowing it to acquire a nuclear weapon capability. Only by a date certain will the Iraqis realize they will assume the personal consequences of not resolving the political issues causing their civil war, and therefore do so. We must have the confidence to work with Iran and Syria, and the other regional nations, which

have an interest in Iraq becoming stable as we redeploy from that nation. We must do so in order to have the resources and time to pay attention to the other security interests of America overseas that are being inadequately addressed, from Afghanistan to North Korea and China, and the Middle East to Iran. We need an increase in 92,000 troops only if we are to remain in Iraq for years to come, as an occupying force. Our security, by pursuing another strategy, does not demand that.

"We've passed bipartisan legislation these past two weeks to institute strong ethics reform, to restore fiscal responsibility, to protect Americans by implementing the 9-11 commission, to raise the minimum wage, to pass life saving stem cell research, to help make college more affordable, and to allow the government to negotiate of lower drug prices. And this is just the beginning of what I hope to accomplish for my district and the nation, which is why I hope to now work on the issues President Bush addressed tonight to address the challenges we face, whether it's the tragic misadventure in Iraq, the need for affordable and accessible health care and education, or the need to make us less dependant on foreign oil. It's time to set aside our partisan differences and get to work for the American people."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.

###